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New York

President:	Mr. Motoc	(Romania)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
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	Chile	Mr. Muñoz
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	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzún
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United States of America	Mr. Danforth

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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04-42278 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Roed-Larsen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Roed-Larsen: On Monday, 28 June, Ruth Zahavi was standing on a sunny sidewalk opposite the kindergarten where her son Afik went every day. In a fraction of a second, while Ruth was waiting with the little boy to cross the street, Afik, three and a half years old, was hit in the legs by fragments of a Qassam rocket launched by Palestinian gunmen from the Gaza Strip. Afik bled heavily, in front of his mother, and lost consciousness before an ambulance could reach him. He died shortly afterwards.

Mordechai Yosepov, 49 years old, was sitting on a bench in front of the kindergarten in this quiet neighbourhood of Sderot when he was instantly killed by fragments from the same Qassam rocket. Ofik's mother, Ruth, survived and will now have to live with this tragedy. No words we say today will undo or even ease the pain that terrible moment of 28 June has inflicted on her, for the rest of her life.

A week later, on Tuesday, 6 July, Dr. Khaled Saleh, a university professor of engineering, and his 16-year-old son, Mohammed, were in the safety of their apartment in Beit-Ilma refugee camp in Nablus. A shootout erupted between Israeli troops and two Palestinian militants they had been trying to arrest. At 3 a.m., the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) called on the residents to leave the house. Khaled went to the window and shouted that his door was stuck, that he was a university professor and that there were children in the house. He was shot in the chest.

A short time later, his son Mohammed was also shot. They both bled to death in front of the rest of their family, as the Israeli troops did not allow a medical team into the building. The IDF later said that it was impossible to let the medics in because of the ongoing gun battle.

This is the gruesome and heartbreaking reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ofik, Ruth, Mordechai, Khaled and Mohammed are no exceptional cases in this unfolding tragedy. Since our last briefing to the Council, violence has continued on the ground, claiming the lives of 61 Palestinians and seven Israelis, and wounding more than 580 Palestinians and 71 Israelis.

Unless both parties take immediate action to halt this terrible bloodshed and resolve their differences over the negotiating table, I am afraid that, by our next briefing to the Council, more people — who are probably now crossing Israeli streets or sitting in their homes in Palestinian cities — will have been killed.

So far, since September 2000, 3,499 Palestinians and 949 Israelis have been killed. More than 34,300 Palestinians and 6,000 Israelis have been injured in the daily bloodshed.

The diary of violent acts is painfully long.

On 27 June, Hamas and Al-Aqsa Brigades militants detonated explosives in a tunnel they had dug underneath a military outpost in the settlement bloc of Gush Katif in the southern Gaza Strip, killing one Israeli soldier and injuring five. In retaliation, Israel conducted missile strikes against targets in Gaza City, hitting a media office affiliated with Hamas in a six-story building in Gaza City, and a metal workshop. Israel also began a bulldozing operation around the outpost where the soldier had been killed, demolishing Palestinian houses and uprooting fields and crops. A

full closure was declared on all crossings and checkpoints in the Gaza Strip.

After the killing of Ofik and Mordechai in Sderot, and the injuring of nine other Israelis, Israel responded by firing three missiles at targets in and near Gaza City, hitting metal workshops. Israel also began a major operation in the northern Gaza Strip, near Beit Hanoun, early on 29 June, using tanks and bulldozers to encircle the city, and demolishing a number of Palestinian houses in order to prevent Palestinian militants from firing Qassam rockets into Israel. At least 20 Palestinians have been killed to date in that operation. Ten of them were killed and at least 20 wounded on 8 July alone. As Israeli troops continued uprooting trees and installations in the area and moved into Beit Hanoun, more than 1,000 dunums of crops were destroyed, though the final extent of the destruction is still unknown. As of today, Beit Hanoun remains isolated, and the operations continue.

On 8 July, five Israeli soldiers, among them two officers with the rank of colonel, were injured in the Gaza Strip when Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile and detonated a roadside bomb near their jeep.

Israeli incursions and arrest campaigns also continued over the last three weeks and culminated in a large-scale IDF operation in the old city of Nablus and the nearby Balata refugee camp between 23 and 27 June. A curfew was imposed and maintained for three consecutive days. A total of 10 Palestinians were killed during that operation, among them the commanders of the Fatah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas military wings in the city. A second major arrest operation took place in Nablus on 6 July, resulting in the deaths of four Palestinians and one Israeli soldier. A shootout erupted as IDF troops were trying to arrest the Nablus commander of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and his deputy. The troops used a missile and engaged in heavy shooting in that densely populated area, killing not only the two militants but also Dr. Khaled Saleh and his 16-year-old son Mohammed.

Parallel to those operations, one Israeli was killed in a shooting attack on his truck in the northern West Bank on 29 June. A second Israeli was shot dead and his wife injured in a gunfire attack on their car near the village of Yabad in the northern West Bank on 4 July, for which responsibility was claimed by the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Brigades.

Then, on 11 July, for the first time in four months, a bombing hit Tel Aviv during the morning rush hour, killing a woman and injuring 30 Israelis, five of them critically. Al-Aqsa Brigades again claimed responsibility for the bombing, stating that it was in retaliation for the assassination of two of its top commanders as well as that of other Palestinians in Israeli incursions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Almost at the same time, four Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip as a car exploded near the settlement of Netzarim in the central Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources claimed that an explosive device planted by Israeli troops had caused the blast. The IDF claimed that the incident had probably been caused by a bomb transported in the car by Palestinian militants. Also on 10 July, a 15-year-old girl who was shot by IDF troops in Rafah several days earlier died of her wounds.

This is the dreadful log of blood and tears we have compiled since Mr. Prendergast's most recent briefing to the Council, just three weeks ago.

House demolitions also continued throughout the reporting period. IDF troops destroyed nine houses and two five-story buildings in the Khan Yunis refugee camp late on 28 June, as well as two shops in the town of Idhna near Hebron. Twelve houses were demolished in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip on 30 June. Another six houses were demolished in Rafah on 2 July; two houses were demolished — one in the Gaza Strip and one in the West Bank — on 4 July; and five houses were demolished in Ramadin, in Hebron, on 5 July. At least 20 houses were reported to have been demolished in the Khan Yunis area on 7 July, and yet another 26 houses were reported demolished in a renewed bulldozing operation in Khan Younis on 11 July, which would bring the total number of houses demolished to almost 90 over the past three weeks. In addition, in the latest house demolitions in Khan Younis, a wheelchair-bound man of more than 70 years of age was crushed to death, as he failed to escape his house in time.

Closure continued to have an impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Despite announcements of intent, restrictions on freedom of movement remained in place. Only occasionally, some restrictions were eased slightly, such as movement between Tulkarem and the surrounding governorates of Nablus, Ramallah and Qalqiliya, thanks to the reopening of the Anabta gate in the first week of July.

However, a number of important checkpoints were closed at times, restricting Palestinian traffic between villages and towns and into Jerusalem. In the context of the Israeli operation around Beit Hanoun, Abu Houli checkpoint was closed completely on 30 June and 1 and 2 July. Palestinian movement in the Gaza Strip was severely affected by the operation, which effectively made access to Beit Hanoun impossible.

Curfews were imposed not only in Nablus, where one lasted for three days during the major operation there between 23 and 27 June, but also in Jericho, Hebron, Kfar Deek in the Salfit area, Kafr Malik near Ramallah, Ramallah Yamoun in the Jenin district, and Deir Ghassana, as well as Beit Rima in Ramallah. On 27 June, the IDF also imposed a curfew on the town of Yamoun near Jenin and searched houses, using police dogs. Explosives and gas were used, which — according to Palestinian sources — destroyed and polluted a number of water wells in the town. The operation continued until 28 June. Renewed curfews were also imposed in Nablus, Huwwara and Beit Sira near Ramallah on 30 June. In Beit Sira, the curfew was maintained for three and a half days until 4 July. On 30 June, the two major checkpoints of Kalandiya and Al-Ram were closed, preventing access to Jerusalem from the West Bank. Further curfews were imposed in Al-Khadr, Jericho, As-Saf and Wadi Ma'ali in Bethlehem, and Kfar Laqif in Qalqiliya on 3 July.

These disturbing events reflect the lack of progress in the political process. I have repeatedly cautioned both parties against the fallacy that a military solution to this conflict is possible. These events, and the events of the last three years, support the broad international consensus that only a political settlement can stop the bloodshed and bring the lives of Palestinians and Israelis back to normalcy. That is why the international community has devised its road map for peace, which the Council adopted in resolution 1515 (2003), calling on the parties to implement it.

Unfortunately, both parties have chosen to ignore this call. The situation brings to mind the words of the historian Barbara Tuchman, who once stated that a noticeable phenomenon throughout history, regardless of place and period, is the pursuit by many Governments of policies contrary to their own interests.

The Palestinian Authority, despite consistent promises by its leadership, has made no progress on its core obligation to take immediate action on the ground to end violence, combat terror and reform and reorganize itself. The Israeli Government has made no progress, either, on its core obligation to immediately dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and to move towards a complete freeze of settlement activities.

Progress on the implementation of Palestinian reform continues to be slow and cannot be explained except by the lack of political will to advance along that road. The Palestinian Authority has decided to begin holding local elections as early as this fall. The commitment to holding elections is a step towards creating more democratic local institutions, and as such should be encouraged. However, the Authority has not yet responded to repeated calls by the international community to reform its electoral institutional framework in order to meet the minimal international standards. It has appointed a partisan body to supervise local elections instead of the existing Central Elections Commission. The Commission, which should prepare and supervise voter registration, is endangered by the Authority's intention to launch a parallel registration process without the necessary impartial supervision. As the Quartet envoys informed Prime Minister Qurei last week, the international community stands ready to support well-prepared elections. However, it continues to be of great concern to the international community that minimal international standards be met with regard to the preparation and conduct of those elections.

The most successful areas where reform has proceeded well are those of finance and public administration. Steady progress has been made in the area of financial reform, with salaries for members of the security services deposited into bank accounts, rather than paid in person, since March 2004. This is very much to the credit of Prime Minister Qurei and Finance Minister Fayad, who work in the most difficult of circumstances. Some progress has also been made in the areas of local Government reform and the restructuring of the Ministry of the National Economy, though high-level political interference in appointments at the Ministry continues to contradict the Basic Law. In addition, little progress has been made in the important field of judiciary reform.

Regarding the crucial area of security reform, the President of the Palestinian Authority has lent only nominal and partial support to the commendable Egyptian efforts aimed at reforming the ailing

Palestinian security services, consistent with the road map. Those efforts have the full support of the Quartet and the international community and represent the best, and probably the last, chance to salvage whatever remains of Palestinian security capabilities. These efforts are necessary to put an end to the steadily emerging chaos in Palestinian areas, to restore law and order and — most importantly — to re-establish the Palestinian Authority as a fully credible partner for the international community.

All those who yearn for peace have already and repeatedly urged President Arafat, in public and in private, to take immediate action to restore this diminished credibility. The Quartet as well as the Arab peace partners have also been active in trying to bring about the necessary reforms. The required elements of reform are clear to all: the consolidation of all security services into three main bodies, rejuvenating its leadership, and putting them under the authority of an effective interior minister who reports to an empowered prime minister. The Palestinian prime minister and cabinet need to be empowered in a way that enables them to make the necessary changes and to carry out the executive tasks entrusted to them by the Palestinian Basic Law. They must be given the power not only to make decisions but also to implement them. Unfortunately, there is so far no sign of any of those measures being taken.

In this context, we cannot but observe that the leader of the Palestinians remains confined to his headquarters in Ramallah in difficult conditions, under de facto house arrest. However, this is not an excuse for passivity and inaction. Decisive, robust and enduring action, particularly in the critical field of security reform, should lead to more vigorous international engagement in the process and to an environment conducive to more bold leadership, consistent with the requirements of the road map and the Egyptian initiative.

Unfortunately, there is no sign of constructive movement at this point in time — far from it. Despite a well-intentioned Prime Minister, the paralysis of the Palestinian Authority has become abundantly clear and the deterioration of law and order in Palestinian areas is steadily worsening. Clashes and showdowns between branches of Palestinian security forces are now common in the Gaza Strip, where the Palestinian Authority's legal authority is receding fast in the face of the mounting power of arms, money and intimidation. Lawlessness and gang rule are becoming common in Nablus, the mayor of which resigned a few months ago in protest against the lack of Palestinian Authority support for the legal authorities. The perceived Palestinian Authority abdication of responsibility has led many Rafah residents to take matters into their own hands, up to the point where some of them established a private checkpoint, preventing Palestinian Authority officials from crossing to Egypt or from entering Rafah. Jericho is actually becoming the only Palestinian city with a functioning police. This collapse of authority cannot be attributed only to the Israeli incursions and operations inside Palestinian towns. The Palestinian Authority is in deep distress and is in real danger of collapse.

Israel's lack of compliance on the sensitive issue of settlements is equally frustrating. Territory lies at the heart of this conflict. It has already been established by the Mitchell Commission that settlement expansion was the most important factor undermining Palestinian trust in the peace process and leading to its breakdown. The drafters of the road map were careful to require from Israel an immediate dismantling of all outposts erected since March 2001, in order to send a clear and positive message to the Palestinians that a paradigm shift is taking place. A full and comprehensive freeze on settlement activities was to be achieved as the security situation improved, but that has not been the case.

According to a report by the settlement watch group Peace Now, there are now 124 outposts on the ground. The report states:

> "These outposts are in continuous growth, in the number of caravans, facilities and inhabitants. Settlement and outpost infrastructure are also rapidly widening and improving.... The building of infrastructure and permanent structures is continuing at the outposts, despite the Government's recent declaration that it intends to dismantle a number of outposts. Only three outposts were dismantled in the last months".

That is no paradigm shift; it is movement in reverse. Settlement expansion has to come to a complete stop.

As members are aware, on Friday, 9 July, the International Court of Justice issued its advisory opinion on the legality of the construction of the barrier in the West Bank. The Court found that

> "Israel is under an obligation to terminate its breaches of international law; it is under an obligation to cease forthwith the works of construction of the wall being built in Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, [and] to dismantle forthwith the structure therein situated".

The Court further called on the United Nations to "consider what further action is required to bring to an end the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall".

Also on the same subject, the Israeli High Court of Justice issued a ruling on 30 June 2004 ordering the Government of Israel to change the course of approximately 30 kilometres of the barrier to the north-west of Jerusalem. The Court based its decision on the grounds that security needs, although legitimate, do not justify the damage done to the Palestinian populations disproportionately affected by the barrier's construction. The ruling said:

> "Only a separation route based on the path of law will lead the State to the security so yearned for.... The route ... injures the local inhabitants in a severe and acute way while violating their rights under humanitarian and international law".

The Secretariat has fully cooperated with General Assembly resolution ES-10/14 of 8 December 2003 regarding this issue. The Secretary-General has submitted a detailed report on the construction of the Israeli barrier and on its impact. He has also provided the Court with an update of that report, and he has communicated all relevant documents at the disposal of the Secretariat to the Court at The Hague. The Secretary-General has communicated the Court's advisory opinion to the General Assembly, which had initially requested it. It is now up to the appropriate bodies of the United Nations to deliberate on that opinion and to decide on next steps. As has been the case in the past, the Secretariat is prepared to provide support and follow-up on decisions taken in that regard by United Nations organs.

The impact of the conflict on the population goes beyond deaths and injuries; the violence also affects the economies on both sides and the living conditions of Israelis and Palestinians alike, spreading the misery further and deeper. There is very little I can add to what has already been said about the impact of the current situation on the Palestinian economy. A recent World Bank report details the misery prevailing in the Palestinian territories and describes the current recession as "the worst in history": worse than the great depression and the recent Argentinean financial crisis. The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be severe, despite the best efforts of donor and humanitarian assistance organizations. Unemployment now stands at 28 per cent, according to the World Bank, with an estimated total of 230,000 unemployed people. Statistical evidence suggests that, on average, a working Palestinian supports four persons, bringing the number of those affected by unemployment to 920,000 — almost a third of the total Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. Poverty rates are rising again in 2004: half of the Palestinians now live under the poverty line. More than two thirds, or 68 per cent, of the residents of Gaza live in poverty.

The Palestinian Authority's fiscal situation is also fragile. The Palestinian Authority has difficulties paying the salaries of its own employees and maintaining a minimal level of social services. The International Monetary Fund has reported that the Palestinian Authority treasury received $24 million per month on average over the past four months, compared with the $54 million budgeted. According to the Palestinian Monetary Authority, the sharp decline in donor budget support cut expenditures on public services such as health, education and social protection by $15 million. Palestinian banking sector data indicate that credit extensions increased to almost $1.2 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2004. The data also suggest that credit extension to the Palestinian Authority rose by 38 per cent and stood at $312 million. That reflects the rise of the Palestinian Authority's use of the banking sector to meet its financial needs owing to falling donor support early this year. Needless to say, a financial collapse would significantly exacerbate the emerging chaos in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The violence has also taken its toll on the Israeli economy in a recession that has been described by many as the worst in Israel's history. In the first years of the peace process, the Israeli economy boomed as Israeli manufacturers became able to enter new overseas markets and to shift parts of their operations abroad. There was also a boom in foreign direct investment, which reached unprecedented levels. Growth, however, started slowing from 1996 onwards

until 2000. A year of hope and d positive developments in the peace process with the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Camp David negotiations in 2000 saw an impressive growth rate of 7.5 per cent. Interestingly, growth was particularly strong during the first nine months of the year and began reversing in the last quarter, once the intifada had started in September 2000.

Gross national income reflects the poor growth of the economy. Thus, for example, total gross national income fell from $107.9 billion in 2001 to $105.2 billion in 2002. Per capita income also declined. According to the Ministry of Finance, gross domestic product per capita — another indicator of the country's standard of living — declined by 7 per cent in cumulative terms during the period 2001-2003. As the Ministry put it, "This is an unprecedented decline in the standard of living".

Despite that gloomy picture, there is hope. Despite the suffering, the bloodshed and the misery, a majority of both Palestinians and Israelis still have faith in the possibility of reconciliation and peace. The latest Israeli polls, published in June, show that 68 per cent of the Israelis support the withdrawal from Gaza and that 54.1 per cent of Israelis support negotiations with the Palestinians aimed at achieving peace. Similarly, even though 53.5 per cent of Israelis feel sympathetic towards settlers who may have to leave their homes, a majority continues to favour the evacuation of settlements if that is necessary in order to achieve a peace agreement. In that context, it is also worth reminding ourselves of the finding of a large Israeli research project conducted during 2002 that a clear majority of settlers would leave their homes if compensated adequately and that only a fraction — 2 per cent — would consider resisting an evacuation order in transgression of Israeli law.

On the Palestinian side, a large majority of 72 per cent continues to favour reconciliation between the two peoples. An overwhelming majority of 92 per cent continues to support calls for fundamental political reform in the Palestinian Authority, giving support to the international community's policy of insisting on tangible reform measures in the Palestinian Authority.

Hope is brought not only by opinion polls. Developments in the diplomatic arena also offer us many opportunities. If seized, they would revive the peace process and lead to the achievement of our shared goal: an end to the occupation that started in 1967 and the establishment of a viable, independent and sovereign Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

As I noted earlier, there was no tangible progress related to the parties' implementation of their commitments under the road map. And it is in that context that the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, announced his important initiative to withdraw the Israeli armed forces from Gaza and parts of the West Bank and to evacuate all settlements in the Gaza Strip as well as four settlements in the northern West Bank.

I am fully aware of the scepticism surrounding that initiative. However, I have chosen to take the opposite position and have argued before the Council that this so-called unilateral withdrawal initiative offers a unique opportunity to revive the peace process. As I outlined in my April briefing to the Council, if the withdrawal is implemented the right way, it could lead to the achievement of our shared goal.

The Quartet, led by Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the top European Union officials, Chris Patten, Javier Solana and the then Foreign Minister and President of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Brian Cowen, as well as United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, supported the withdrawal initiative at their meeting at United Nations Headquarters on 4 May 2004. The two Arab countries most involved in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, Egypt and Jordan, came out publicly with the same position. A withdrawal from Gaza, bringing the occupation of the Strip to an end, is consistent with the calls for bold steps we have made to Prime Minister Sharon since the beginning of his term. It is also consistent with detailed proposals presented by Secretary-General Annan to the Quartet last summer.

Yet some Israelis and Palestinians still express reservations about that initiative and its possible impact on the peace process. Some Palestinians fear that the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank is a smokescreen that would divert world attention from implementation of the road map and lead, instead, to a lengthy and open-ended process focused exclusively on the tiny Gaza Strip. That, they fear, would only lead to Israel further expanding its settlements in the West Bank and eliminating the possibility of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. Others fear that the

withdrawal from Gaza would not lead to the end of the occupation of the area. Rather, they fear that Israel would retain tight control over Gaza's borders and waters, sealing it off and separating it completely from Israel and therefore severely damaging its economy, de facto turning it into a prison for 1.5 million Palestinians. In Israel, some fear that a full withdrawal from Gaza would turn it into an incubator for terrorism and a launching pad for attacks against Israel, possibly using weapons even more deadly than the home-made Qassam rockets. Those fears are not baseless. Yet they are often and unnecessarily used as a pretext for passivity and inaction.

I have already stated before the Council that the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank could be carried out the right way or the wrong way. The right way, as the Quartet principals defined it in their 4 May statement, is a full, clean and complete withdrawal leading to the end of the occupation of Gaza. Similar steps in the West Bank should accompany it. The withdrawal should take place within the framework of the road map and the two-State vision. It should also be fully coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the Quartet.

If the withdrawal were implemented the wrong way, the fears to which I referred would almost certainly come true. But fears, though legitimate, should not prevent us from moving ahead. Rather, they should guide our common action. They should prompt us to exercise more caution and to be more vigilant, but they should never become an excuse for inaction and passivity.

For, if the withdrawal were implemented the right way, it would open up an unprecedented opportunity for progress towards peace. The end of the occupation of the Gaza Strip would free half of the Palestinians from occupation and demonstrate to the Israelis that evacuating settlements is both possible and compatible with Israel's interests. It would also demonstrate that withdrawal, not occupation, brings security. It would create momentum for the movement towards Palestinian independence, re-establish trust between Israelis and Palestinians and restore dialogue in place of violence.

Ending the occupation of Gaza would be the most important step taken since the mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. If all goes well, it would be a model that could take the parties a long way towards a full end of the occupation that started in 1967, hand in hand with the recognition of the State of Israel and of its right to exist and live in peace and security with its neighbours.

The Quartet envoys met last week with Palestinian Prime Minister Qurei in Ramallah. We emphasized to the Prime Minister that our support for the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank does not in any way affect our insistence on the fulfilment of outstanding obligations related to the West Bank. Nothing in our support for the withdrawal initiative lessens our focus on the rest of the obligations included in the road map and reiterated by the Quartet principals in their 4 May statement in New York.

In the same meeting, Minister Saeb Erekat asked us how we envisage the link between the Gaza withdrawal and the implementation of the road map. The link is simple and clear. The requirements for the success of the withdrawal initiative are the very same requirements involved in the implementation of the road map. If both parties commit themselves to the tasks at hand — which would make the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank a success — they would be able to implement the road map in a speedy and orderly fashion.

Allow me to elaborate on that point. For the withdrawals to succeed, each of the parties will have to carry out a crucial task. Israel's task is to withdraw fully and completely from the Gaza Strip, transferring control to a reformed and reorganized Palestinian Authority, with reliable Palestinian security arrangements supervised by third parties acceptable to both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. There is no way around that task. A partial withdrawal or a withdrawal while retaining control would not constitute an end of the occupation and would therefore defeat the entire purpose of the withdrawal. Withdrawing without establishing a security regime supervised by reliable third parties would be a recipe for renewed conflict. Security for Israel and freedom for the Palestinians are not only compatible with one another: they are actually intertwined and interdependent.

The Palestinian task is to act immediately and without delay to reconstitute its security forces as stipulated in the road map and as detailed and operationalized by the Egyptian initiative. Security reform, as is the case with the entire reform agenda

enjoys the support of a majority of Palestinians, and the Palestinian Authority has the duty to implement it in a speedy manner. As Quartet envoys informed the Palestinian Prime Minister in their meeting in Ramallah on 7 July, the time for drafting security plans has passed, as we already have a well-developed security plan that enjoys the support of the international community. That plan has been submitted to the Palestinian Authority by the Government of Egypt and is supported by the Quartet. Now is the time for action. The credibility of the Palestinian Authority is at stake, and its interests as well as the interests of the Palestinian people will best be served by decisive action on its part to reform and reorganize itself and regain the full credibility it once enjoyed.

The international community also has a crucial task at hand, and that is to take the parties by the hand along the challenging and laborious road leading to peace, as described by the Quartet principals in their 4 May statement and in the road map. Since our last briefing, Quartet envoys have met twice, at Taba on 23 June and at United Nations headquarters in Jerusalem on 7 July. They also met with representatives of the donor community and with the Palestinian Prime Minister. Quartet representatives — together with Norwegian, Japanese and World Bank officials — will meet in mid-July with the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Silvan Shalom, to discuss the same topics. The envoys will continue to monitor closely the situation on the ground and the progress that will, hopefully, be made by the parties. They have decided to remain actively engaged and to intensify their consultations to that effect.

The envoys will start preparations for a meeting of the Task Force on Palestinian Reform to be held during this summer, followed by a meeting of the main body of the donors, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians — known as the AHLC — in September, with a meeting of the Quartet principals, which is also to be held in September here in New York, to review progress and determine the future course of action.

Let me now turn to the situation between Israel and Lebanon.

Although an atmosphere of tension and potential instability continues to exist along the Blue Line, the situation has remained relatively calm since the last briefing to the Council. Israel, however, has continued to violate Lebanese airspace. On 29 June, 15 Israeli aircraft overflew the Blue Line 11 times. Shortly afterwards, Hizbullah fired three rounds of heavy machine gun fire. The direction of fire and its point of impact could not be ascertained. No anti-aircraft fire was reported to have taken place during the reporting period.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly stated that one violation does not justify another. He has repeatedly called on Israel to cease its violations of Lebanese airspace. He has also repeatedly called on the Government of Lebanon to exert its control over all its territory and to ensure full compliance with international law.

It is important that all parties exercise restraint and avoid the escalatory cycle of violations. Such restraint is required in order to maintain stability along the Blue Line. It is my hope that the relative calm that has prevailed along the Blue Line in the last month is reflective of the parties' renewed desire for a greater degree of stability in the area.

Unfortunately, no progress has been achieved on the Syrian-Israeli track. I sincerely hope that the two countries will find an appropriate way, in the near future, to resume their suspended peace negotiations. That will contribute to creating an environment conducive to comprehensive peace in the region.

As I said earlier, in this conflict the fears of the sceptics are not baseless. It is clear to me that if Israelis and Palestinians do not carry out the aforementioned tasks, those fears will come true. Yet, again, that is no excuse for inaction or passivity. Quite to the contrary, it is reason for intensified and even more determined action in order to direct events down the right path.

I admit that it would be much more comfortable for all of us if we could design a perfect plan, pass it to the parties and then watch while they implemented it in good faith. But we do not have that luxury. I also admit that it would be more comfortable for us to sit in our chairs, express our doubts about the chances of success of this or that plan, show sympathy for the suffering of the victims of the conflict on this or that side, indulge in arguments over the asymmetry between the occupier and the occupied or over the immoral equivalency between self-defence and terrorism, and then wrap up and go out to resume our normal, easy lives and rest peacefully in our untroubled moral self-righteousness.

It would be comfortable to do that. But then again, at the same time, more Mohammeds and Afiks get killed in the safety of their homes, or in the arms of their parents on their way to kindergarten. It is very simple indeed: when we fail, people get killed. We therefore have only two options before us: either we act all the time — patiently and tirelessly trying to find a way out of this conflict — or we sit and watch as more people bleed. The choice is for each of us to make.

The President: I thank Mr. Roed-Larsen for his comprehensive briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.